

Section 8: Creating The Ironbound Community Master Plan

Background Efforts: Emerging Principles

Ironbound Community Corporation's work on planning has always been a community based, open to the public process, in which people were encouraged to participate. As early as 1997 Recreation Roundtables were held in several locations in the community to discuss the lack of open space, and identify potential green parks in the neighborhood. One of these, at St. Benedict's Church, involved a giant community map laid out on the gym floor, with people walking around it. These meetings were accompanied by a Neighborhood Recreation Survey (in three languages). Results from these meetings were forwarded to the Kathleen Kelly, the administrator in the City of Newark who was working on forming a revised Master Plan for the City.

Working cooperatively with the City, drafts of its new plans were reviewed in public meetings in Ironbound in March of 1999 at St. James church, and in April 1999 at Club Orensano. Again neighbors came to openly advertised public meetings and clustered around maps to give input as to what should be happening in the community.

In November of 1999, a Steering Committee was formed which began to meet monthly. Developing a community plan was one of its two goals. The Steering Committee was intentionally composed of representative groups: recreation organizations, churches, parents, seniors citizens, businesses (list attached). In March, 2000, this organization circulated petitions objecting to the City's Master Plans for Ironbound. ICC was among the organizations presenting petitions at City Hall. The Steering Committee (attached) continues to this day to guide ICC's planning work.

Beginning The ICC Master Plan: Visioning

From July to September 2000, more formal planning work began with a series "visioning" workshops in the Thomas and South St. area on July 24 and 27 and the Hawkins St. area on September 7 to 9. These workshops were open to the public, advertised through fliers, and were conducted by planners. Members of the public were asked to identify their major positives and negatives of their neighborhoods, and to prioritize what would make the most difference in improving quality of life. Martha Lamar, a pro-bono planner, began volunteering her time at ICC, and led this "visioning" effort.

Initial work on an Open Space plan also begun during this period. ICC set out to involve volunteers in a Vacant Land Survey. Tax maps divided block by block, and neighbors were assigned blocks on which to "map" existing uses, and identify open space. The work was coordinated by ICC. The survey work continued into 2001.

During this same period at the citywide level, ICC began looking at land for schools, and participated in Land for Learning, a grassroots movement to draw attention to the need to reserve land for new schools, which were slated to be built due to the state's Abbott ruling. All of Ironbound's schools were to be replaced, but the city made no provision to hold the land identified for the schools. ICC joined other non-profits from around the city to organize a march and rally in June of 2000 at city hall, a Christmas card delivery for schools (Nov. 2001). The Master Plan Working Group, an ad hoc coalition of residents groups and non-profits since 1997, of which ICC was a founding member, was instrumental in this effort.

This early planning work, with the guidance of the Steering Committee, and input from many residents and businesses, revealed the neighborhood's major concerns, major challenges, and major opportunities. These basic concerns became principles which were used as work went forward to get a Community Master Plan complete.

Finalizing ICC Master Plan

In 2001, Martha Lamar recruited Alan Mallach, one of the state's most respected planners, to assist her in work to formalize an Ironbound Community Master Plan. The early visioning workshops and roundtables

provided many of the basic neighborhood concerns, which were now drawn into a statement of principles. These plus the work from the initial visioning sessions would be the basis for a "draft" plan which would now be taken back into the community. Some key components of the plan would include:

- A line between industrial and residential development to preserve jobs
- Transition zones, with heights going down from the CBD
- Creating open space areas, park along the river, greening routes through the neighborhood
- A core neighborhood preservation area, where development would conform to blocks around it
- Land be reserved for proposed new schools

Three community meetings were announced for the eastern, western and middle of the community in order to invite the public's input on the draft plan: July 23 at Mt. Zion Baptist Church on Thomas St., July 30 at Trinity Reformed Church, and July 31 at St. Casimir's Church. (An additional meeting was held at the Van Buren St. Public Library on Sept. 19 but was cancelled due to 9/11). Outreach for these meetings was typical of all of ICC's planning work, including:

- Announcements in the newspaper
- Fliering, mailings
- Notices through schools, churches announcements and bulletins
- Working through Steering Committee organizations

In addition to these meetings, presentations and input sessions were done with the Ironbound Business Improvement District staff and Board, the Portuguese American Congress, five of Ironbound's public schools parent meetings, all three of Ironbound's parochial schools, and three out of four tenant organizations (Pennington, Hyatt and Terrell).

At these meetings, Martha Lamar and Alan Mallach presented the "draft" plan, working with tax maps of the area, and overlaid tissue paper, onto which principles and ideas from all the visioning work up to this point were overlaid. The community was asked to change, add, comment, delete to the "draft" plan. Feedback would be would later incorporated in the final printed version of the Community Master Plan.

Additional "community input" and "comment" meetings were held August 8 at the Wilson Ave. Block Watch, September 19 at the Van Buren St. Public Library.

The City of Newark requested a presentation about Ironbound's work, which was given by Alan Mallach to top City administrators at City Hall on September 29, 2001. Although the formal product wasn't complete, Mr. Mallach was able to present all of the major ideas that would become Ironbound's Community Land Use Plan.

With the Land Use Plan drawing to completion (printing took place in December 2001), the Steering Committee turned to the developing an Open Space Plan, which would look more closely at the lack of green space for recreation in the neighborhood. The Wallace, Roberts and Todd firm was retained, and an Open Space/Recreation Charette was held on October 17, 2001 at St. Casimir's Church Hall. About fifty different organizations were invited to attend (list attached) representing all of the major recreational and cultural groupings in the neighborhood.

Distribution and Follow Up

January 2002 began with the Steering Committee distributing 12,000 copies of the Land Use Maps. The maps were sent out through every public and parochial school, dance centers, senior citizen clubs, businesses and churches. According to an ICC report from the time, "Reaction to the maps has been extremely positive - from community people, those across the city involved in similar issues, and those outside Newark who support Ironbound's goals."

The City of Newark, responding to pressure from the Master Plan Working Group, announced that it begin holding ten hearings on its own draft Master Plan Land Use Maps. The Ironbound meeting was scheduled for

Feb. 20, 2002 at East Side High School. Since no formal response or "inclusion" had occurred which would blend ICC's Masterplan with the City's draft, both were presented side-by-side under an agreed upon pre-arrangement at the high school meeting. The meeting was hosted and chaired by Ironbound Community Corporation and the Planning Steering Committee.

ICC did outreach to get people to the East Side by making presentations at other community meetings: at parent meetings at public schools, St. Casimir's School, Terrell Homes Tenant Association, the Public Library. An editorial meeting was held with the local Portuguese newspaper and a large article, including a color version of ICC's Land Use Plan appeared on the front page. Materials were prepared in three languages for the meeting. Over 150 people attended the meeting. All of those speaking at the meeting supported the Ironbound Community Master Plan, asked the City to include it, or to make amendments to its plan which would incorporate its principles.

Following up on the meeting, the Steering Committee printed 5000 postcards addressed to the Mayor in support of the Ironbound Community Master Plan, and these cards were delivered to the Mayor's office by a representative group from the community.

Early versions of the waterfront plan were taken to meetings throughout the neighborhood in order to get input: Wilson Ave. Blockwatch, Tenant organizations, church groups, the Ironbound Business Improvement District, South Ironbound Business group, community events at Riverbank Park etc. A final version of an Open Space Plan was presented to the Open Space Advisory Committee in power point in April 2002, following a series of meetings at which WRT incorporated community input. The process which was followed is outlined in a slide from their powerpoint presentation of April 2002 (attached).

Ironbound's particularized planning work for the East Ferry Street area has followed a similar public input process, with well publicized community meetings at ICC August 8, 2004, at Hawkins St. School on Nov. 11, 2004, and Casa do Minho on Nov. 2004 to gather input (see attachments), which would be incorporated into the final East Ferry Street Plan.

The Steering Committee has continued to play a key role in the second round of planning for the waterfront park (Gateway Park Plan), along with the Waterfront Advisory Committee. During 2005 - 2007.???The Waterfront Advisory Committee has grown to include members of the City Administration, waterfront landowners and businessmen, environmental and recreation organizations and community residents. A public community presentation was made at the Portuguese Sports Club on _____. Another community presentation was made to members of the 200 business community on _____.

Attached are documents which evidence

- A. Community outreach efforts -
- b. Community input opportunities - Visioning meetings, July to September 2000
- c. Although there was no process in place whereby the a community organization could create and submit a plan, the City of Newark was well aware of Ironbound 's efforts to create a Master Plan beginning in _____. At the request of the City, in his September 2001 presentation to City department heads, Alan Mallach asked that the Plan be adopted formally into the City of Newark's new Land Use Map. The City of Newark was formally involved in the Advisory Board for the Open Space Plan (see list), and the East Ferry St. Plan (letter attached).
- d. Letters of support from three organizations who are members of the Steering Committee who have been part of this effort and continue to serve in this role
- e. Meetings at which draft Community Plan was made available. June to September 2001